Trainers sidelined from Qld taskforce

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TAFES and universities have been left off a Queensland taskforce set up this week to overhaul the state’s training sector.

Premier Campbell Newman said the 12-person Skills and Training Taskforce, established to address current and future skill needs, included representatives from public and private training providers as well as industry and business leaders.

But while the taskforce includes two private college representatives there are no appointees from universities or from TAFEs, which provide most of the state’s skills training.

The industry-dominated taskforce includes appointees from seven employers’ groups including peak bodies for mining, tourism, housing, retail and horticulture.

It also includes three state government department heads and a sole employee’s representative from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

The Queensland Teachers’ Union, which covers TAFE, said it was “dismayed”.

“We weren’t surprised that [our] union wasn’t invited onto the taskforce but we were stunned there weren’t any TAFE directors,” said industrial officer Louise Comino.

Ms Comino said the state government wanted to reduce the stability and market share of TAFEs, and had left TAFE representatives off the taskforce to help achieve that outcome.

“It means they’ve got an agenda – it’s pre-determined,” she said.

Training Minister John-Paul Langbroek said the terms of reference included TAFE reform, and that including TAFE representatives would consequently have created a conflict of interest.

“We don’t want Caesar judging Caesar,” he said.

Mr Langbroek said TAFE representatives would still be free to make presentations to the taskforce.

His spokeswoman said the conflict of interest concerns didn’t apply to private colleges because they weren’t “explicitly the subject of the terms of reference”.
However, while the terms of reference require the taskforce to review the role and function of the statutory bodies – which include TAFE, Skills Queensland and industry skills councils – the principal task is to tell the government how to improve the operation of the overall vocational training sector.

And the previous government apparently saw no conflict of interest problems in appointing TAFE and QTU representatives to its Transformation of TAFE Queensland taskforce late last year.

The new taskforce includes Education Department head Julie Grantham as one of three “official” members. Mr Langbroek’s office said this was acceptable because she oversaw all education and training providers, not just the statutory bodies.

However Ms Grantham has no direct experience in vocational training.

Arguably, the taskforce member with most knowledge of public training provision is former TAFE NSW employee Claire Field. Ms Field now represents private colleges as CEO of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training.

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